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By H.C.Lockwood.

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## THE CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER.

### FIRST EXPEDITION.

THE capture of Fort Fisher was one of the most brilliant naval and military achievements of the war. This formidable earthwork was situated on Federal Point, N. C., in the department of Virginia and North Carolina, and was built more particularly to guard the entrance of New Inlet, while Fort Caswell served the same purpose in respect to the West Inlet.

This department was under the command of Major-General Benjamin F. Butler.

There were other extensive fortifications on Smith's Island and on the banks of the Cape Fear River. Although a large and expensive blockading fleet was kept continually opposite these inlets, still, on account of the peculiar formation of the mouth of Cape Fear River and the effect of storms, it was next to an impossibility on the one hand to prevent the exportation of cotton and other products of the South, and, on the other, entirely to exclude foreign supplies and munitions of war from the port of Wilmington. The necessity of putting an end to this illicit commerce with the Rebels, by the capture of these defences of Wilmington, had long been urged upon the government.

But there were also other great objects to be accomplished. General Sherman was rapidly approaching Savannah, and it was believed that after taking that city he would march to Goldsboro, N. C. It therefore became important that the government should have possession of Wilmington, so that supplies might be sent up the Cape Fear River.

The reduction of these defences could not be accomplished by the navy, and "without military aid and co-operation it could not be effected or even wisely attempted." In the fall of 1864 the War and Navy Departments agreed

to organize a joint movement which would insure success. The Secretary of the Navy said in his report, in relation to the naval branch of the expedition, that "to place that force under the command of the first officer in the navy was a duty. Vice-Admiral Farragut was therefore selected to conduct the enterprise, but impaired health, the result of exposure and unremitting exertions during two years of active labor and unceasing efforts in the Gulf, rendered it imprudent for that distinguished and energetic officer to enter upon this service." Admiral Farragut having declined to serve for the reasons above stated, on the 22d day of September, 1864, the Secretary of the Navy detached Rear-Admiral D. D. Porter from the command of the Mississippi Squadron, and ordered him to proceed to Beaufort, N. C., and relieve Acting Rear-Admiral S. P. Lee, in command of the North Atlantic Blockading-Squadron.

Fort Fisher having been the objective point of the two expeditions, it may not be inappropriate to add a brief description of it.

"Fort Fisher is situated on the peninsula between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean, about a mile and a half northeast of Federal Point. For five miles north of Federal Point this peninsula is sandy and low, not rising more than fifteen feet above high tide, the interior abounding in fresh-water swamps, often wooded and almost impassable, while much of the dry land, till one gets within half a mile of Fort Fisher, is covered with wood or low undergrowth, except a strip about three hundred yards wide along the sea-shore.

"Fort Fisher consists of two fronts, — the first, or land front, running across the peninsula at this point, seven hundred yards wide, is four hundred

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and eighty yards in length; while the second, or sea front, runs from the right of the first parallel to the beach to the Mound Battery, a distance of thirteen hundred yards. The land front is intended to resist any attack from the north, the sea front to prevent any of our naval vessels from running through New Inlet, or landing troops on Federal Point.

“1. *Land Front.*—This front consists of a half-bastion on the left, or Cape Fear River side, connected by a curtain with a bastion on the ocean side. The parapet is twenty-five feet thick, averages twenty feet in height, with traverses rising ten feet above it and running back on their tops, which were from eight to twelve feet in thickness, to a distance of from thirty to forty feet from the interior crest. The traverses on the left half bastion were about twenty-five feet in length on the top.

“The earth for this heavy parapet, and the enormous traverses at their inner ends, more than thirty feet in height, was obtained partly from a shallow exterior ditch, but mainly from the interior of the work. Between each pair of traverses there was one or two guns. The traverses on the right of this front were only partially completed. A palisade, which is loop-holed and has a banquette, runs in front of this face at a distance of about fifty feet in front of the foot of the exterior slope from the Cape Fear River to the ocean, with a position for a gun between the left of the front and the river, and another between the right of the front and the ocean. Through the middle traverse on the curtain was a bomb-proof postern, whose exterior opening was covered by a small redan for two field-pieces, to give flank fire along the curtain. The traverses were generally bomb-proofed, for men or magazines. The slopes of the work appear to have been revetted with marsh sod, or covered with grass, and to have had an inclination of forty-five degrees, or a little less. . . . There was a formidable system of torpedoes two hundred yards in advance of this front,

the torpedoes being about eighty feet apart and each containing about one hundred pounds of powder. They were connected with the fort by three sets of wires. . . .

“2. *Sea Front.*—This front consists of a series of batteries, mounting in all twenty-four guns, the different batteries being connected by a strong infantry parapet, so as to form a continuous line. The same system of heavy traverses for the protection of the guns, is used as on the land front, and these traverses are also generally bomb-proofed. It may be added that, in the thirty bomb-proof magazines and the passages, there were fourteen thousand five hundred feet of floor space, not including the main magazine, which was exploded and whose dimensions are unknown.” (See Report of General C. B. Comstock, of General Grant’s staff, dated Head-quarters United States Forces, Fort Fisher, N. C., January 27, 1865.)

On the 6th of December, 1864, General Grant wrote to General Butler, “The details for the execution are intrusted to you and the officers immediately in command of the troops.” All the troops which composed the army branch of both expeditions were drawn from the Army of the James, which army was commanded by General Butler. The necessary marching orders having been issued to the troops who were to take part in the expedition, Major-General Benjamin F. Butler called on Lieutenant-General U. S. Grant at his head-quarters at City Point, Va., on the night of the 8th day of December, for the purpose of informing him of the fact. Lieutenant-Colonel Comstock was here taken on board of General Butler’s boat. General Butler said to the Lieutenant-General, on taking his leave, “Now we will get off as soon as we can,” and “I shall be before Fort Fisher on or about the 16th day of December, and I hope I shall be able to present the fort to you as a Christmas present.”

As soon as darkness closed in on the 7th day of December, 1864, General

Ames, with the picked men of his division, moved out from their position on the New Market Road, followed by General Paine's division of colored troops and Captain R. L. Lee's Battery of Independent Artillery. Through a rain-storm this column pressed on across the pontoon bridge at Deep Bottom, and reached the signal-tower on the Appomattox before daybreak. Here camp-fires were lighted. The probable object of this was to lead the enemy to believe that we were moving troops to the left on the Weldon Railroad. Early Thursday morning the line of march was again taken up for Bermuda Hundreds, where the troops were embarked on transports. On account of the draught of these transports, many of them were obliged to anchor in the river during the night, and it was Saturday before all the vessels had arrived in Hampton Roads. The following composed the army branch of the expedition: Major-General Benjamin F. Butler and staff, Lieutenant-Colonel C. B. Comstock, of General Grant's staff, Major-General Godfrey Weitzel and staff (although General Butler accompanied the expedition as Commanding General, still General Weitzel was in the immediate command of the troops), 2d Division of 24th Army Corps under the command of Brigadier-General Adelbert Ames, 3d Division of 25th Army Corps under the command of Brigadier-General Charles J. Paine, and Captain R. L. Lee Battery of Independent Artillery. These troops, taken together, amounted to about six thousand five hundred men. Generals Butler and Weitzel and Lieutenant-Colonel Comstock made their headquarters on board of the Ben Deford, General Ames on the Baltic, and General Paine on the Livingston. The naval force consisted of thirty-seven vessels, five of which were iron-clads, and a reserved force of nineteen vessels.

On Saturday, the 10th of December, General Butler telegraphed to General Grant that he was at Fortress Monroe, ready to sail and waiting for the navy. General Grant replied to this:

"If you do not get off immediately you will lose the chance of surprising a weak garrison." The idea of the Lieutenant-General seemed to be that the success of the expedition depended on the celerity of its movements in order to make a surprise. In this he was to be disappointed, for delay after delay occurred.

On the 13th of December Admiral Porter wrote General Butler that "the rest of the fleet would leave here in three hours, and proceed to the rendezvous, twenty-five miles east of Cape Fear River." On account of the delay the expedition had become common talk at Fortress Monroe and Norfolk.

General Butler being assured at last that the navy was in readiness to sail, and that several vessels had in fact already sailed, and knowing that a portion of the country between the Potomac and the Rappahannock Rivers was infested with spies and scouts, in order to deceive the enemy ordered his whole fleet to get ready and proceed up the Potomac as far as Matthias Point. No doubt many a courier fled to announce the presence of the armada, and then the strategical object was accomplished. As soon as it was dark the bows were turned down the river, and the morning of the 14th of December found the army fleet lying off Cherry-stone Point. The navy had already sailed, and must have had some twenty-four hours' start. Admiral Porter has since claimed that he did not sail first. It is very probable the Admiral thought that, when the army sailed up the bay that they had gone directly to sea.

About four o'clock in the afternoon of the 14th the Major-General commanding arrived on the Ben Deford and directed the fleet to immediately weigh anchor and sail for the point of its destination. This was a sight long to be remembered. Few army officers had ever seen such a magnificent display. The decks of the vessels were crowded to witness this small army afloat. Many an anxious inquiry was made as to its destination, for, up to



this time, no one appeared to know, although Wilmington seemed to be the point selected by the staff and other officers who had good opportunities of forming a judgment. After giving these orders, General Butler sailed on in advance of the transport fleet. Soon after starting, General Ames, wishing further instructions in relation to the sailing and rendezvousing of the fleet now temporarily under his command, despatched a staff officer in the Winans, a North River tug-boat, to communicate with General Butler upon this subject. This officer overtook the Ben Deford twenty-five miles south of Cape Lookout, in the afternoon of the next day. He then stood off to meet the fleet and was taken on board the Baltic at about four o'clock. The transport fleet was collected late in the night of the 15th, twenty-five miles due east of Masonboro Inlet. Here the army awaited the coming of the navy, which did not arrive until the afternoon of the 18th.

During the whole of the 16th we were drifting at sea. The ocean was smooth, and we were experiencing the finest possible weather. General Butler stood in toward the blockading fleet, the transport fleet remaining at Masonboro Inlet. The sea was so calm that he lowered his gig and took a row for pleasure. This weather continued up to the night of the 18th of December. During these days of delay every soldier who could procure a hook and line turned fisherman for the nonce. Blackfish were caught in large numbers.

On the 17th of December General Ames started in the Winans to report to General Butler, who was found with the blockading fleet off Federal Point. Here, together with General Weitzel and Colonel Comstock, on this little vessel, he reconnoitred Fort Fisher under fire. The information gained was of an important character.

On the afternoon of the 18th Rear-Admiral Porter with his navy arrived off New Inlet. He determined to commence operations immediately. At this time the mysterious torpedo made its first appearance. There had been

many rumors afloat regarding it. Now it had actually arrived, and the Admiral gave orders to have it exploded that very night.

The effect of explosions at Erith and Woolwich in England, and at City Point on the James, had suggested to General Butler the use of a torpedo in the destruction of fortifications. He believed that the proper ignition of an immense amount of powder under the walls of Fort Fisher would dismount the guns, explode the magazines, and probably destroy its garrison. He communicated this idea to Admiral Porter, who indorsed the opinion of the General. Admiral Porter afterwards said that he believed that the explosion would destroy Wilmington and Smithville. Rear-Admiral Porter's General Order No. 70, dated North Atlantic Squadron, Hampton Roads, December 10, 1864, among other things, contains the following directions: "It is first proposed to endeavor to paralyze the garrison by an explosion, all the vessels remaining twelve miles out from the bar, and the troops in transports twelve miles down the coast ready to steam up, and be prepared to take the works by assault in case the latter are disabled. At a given signal all the bar vessels will run off shore twelve miles, when the vessel with powder will go in under the forts. When the explosion takes place, all the vessels will stand in shore in the order marked on the plan." The Admiral thought a good deal would be accomplished by the explosion, and also advised that the vessels should be run out twenty-five miles and the steam drawn, lest their boilers should be blown up by the explosion.

The arrangements necessary to carry out this enterprise had to be executed by the navy. A flat-bottomed, light-draught, worn-out propeller of two hundred and fifty tons, called the Louisiana, was ordered to and arrived at Hampton Roads on the 30th of November, 1864. She was subsequently altered to resemble a blockade-runner at Norfolk, Va. Under an order of

Admiral Porter's, in which he stated that the chances were "death or glory, honor or promotion," Commander Alexander C. Rhind was selected to execute the plan for the explosion, which was fraught with so much danger. After having changed the appearance of the vessel, she was sent down to Craney Island, at the mouth of the Elizabeth River, where she received one hundred and eighty-five tons of powder. It was placed on the berth-deck in fifty-pound bags, also in the coal-bunker, and the rest in the deck-house. On the 13th day of December, 1864, a temporary crew was placed on her, and she was towed to Beaufort and anchored near Shackelford Banks. It was here she had thirty additional tons of powder placed on board her. On the morning of the 18th of December this immense torpedo was again towed by the *Sassacus* to a point off New Inlet, arriving there a little after dark. The soundings had only been completed on the 17th of December. However, Admiral Porter had already determined to explode the powder-boat on the following night. At about half past nine o'clock in the evening of the 18th of December the *Wilderness* took the torpedo in tow and stood in toward Fort Fisher for the purpose of executing the order. But the threatening aspect of the weather, the disappearance of the lights on the mound, induced Commander Rhind to give up the enterprise for the night. At eight o'clock in the evening General Butler received a letter from Admiral Porter to the effect that he had already sent the powder-boat in to have it exploded. General Butler immediately sent General Weitzel and Colonel Comstock on board the *Malvern* to ask a postponement. It was evident that there could be no benefit derived, if the troops could not be landed and the enemy prevented from gaining time to repair damages. The A. D. Vance was then despatched to countermand the order, and met the *Louisiana* returning from the fort. Thus ended the first attempt to explode the torpedo.

It was now evident that the wind was freshening, and all the old salts predicted a gale. The troops had been ten days on transports. The coal and water was exhausted on nearly all of them. This made a resupply necessary. Besides this, a gale had arisen and was rapidly increasing to a terrific storm. As a simple matter of safety the army fleet was obliged to go to some port of shelter. On the morning of the 19th General Butler took the wise precaution to send a few vessels into Beaufort that needed supplies. By the 20th the dreadful storm had burst upon the vessels with all its fury. Nearly all the transports were sent into Beaufort, N. C., for a safe harbor and for supplies; but the stanch old *Baltic* pointed her prow to the sea, and nobly rode out the violence of the elements. The navy also remained outside. One small army vessel that had not received the order to go into Beaufort, and which had on board a battery of artillery, came near being lost. The men in the midst of the gale were obliged to dismount the guns and take the carriages apart and put them in the bottom of the vessel, to save her from total wreck. General Butler accompanied his fleet. From this point he sent a staff officer to Admiral Porter, to inform him that he would return off New Inlet as soon as he had coaled and watered, certainly by the 25th of December, 1864. Every one went to work to supply the transports and to prepare them again for sea service. This was not accomplished until the morning of the 24th of December. These vessels could not have been resupplied at an earlier date, for it was only by the almost superhuman efforts of the officers of the fleet that it was effected by the time mentioned. In order to water the fleet they had to send fifteen miles up the railroad. The gale had not entirely spent its fury until the morning of the 23d of December.

While the army was thus storm-bound in Beaufort, without coal or water, Admiral Porter determined to attack Fort Fisher.

The Admiral, in his report dated North Atlantic Squadron, United States ship Malvern, at sea off Beaufort, N. C., December 26, 1864, says: "After the southwester, the wind chopped around to the westward and gave us a beautiful spell of weather, which I could not afford to lose; and the transports with the troops not making their appearance, I determined to take advantage of it, and attack Fort Fisher and its outworks. . . . On the 23d I directed Commander Rhind to proceed and explode the vessel." The explosion of the powder-boat was to precede the attack to be made on the following day by the navy alone, for it was well known that the army could not be present on the 24th day of December. It is a remarkable fact that, although General Butler had suggested the use of this immense torpedo, the privilege of being personally present at its explosion should not have been at least accorded him. The success of the enterprise would seem to have demanded the presence of the army, so that in case any of the supposed effects of the torpedo had been experienced, it could have been in a position to reap the benefits resulting therefrom.

Is it fair to presume that the sailors and marines could have operated against the fort, even though its garrison were in a demoralized condition, as effectively as the army, trained and accustomed as it was to this specialty in warfare? The Admiral must have had the utmost confidence in the powder-boat to think that he could, after the explosion, send a few of his marines ashore to walk in and take possession. However, the fact remains that the army was in Beaufort, N. C., when the Admiral ordered Commander Rhind to explode the Louisiana.

Here the powder-boat again plays an important part. There had been four different appliances adopted for the ignition of the powder: 1. A clock-work; 2. Lighted candles with fuses; 3. Slow match; and 4. Firing the ship. At about eleven o'clock on the night

of the 23d of December the Wilderness once more took the mammoth torpedo in tow and started in toward the fort. The Wilderness continued in until she was in six fathoms of water when she cast the Louisiana off. The powder-boat then steamed on alone until she was about eight hundred and fifty yards off the northeast salient of the fort, where she was anchored. (See Colonel Comstock's map.) On the other hand, General Whiting estimates this distance to have been "between twelve (12) and fifteen hundred (1500) yards, not nearer." (See Report on the Conduct of the War, p. 106.) Here a few minutes were spent in making the final arrangements to explode the powder. The firing party then repaired to the deck of the Wilderness, which vessel ran out about twelve miles to sea and awaited the effect of the explosion. Commodore Rhind in his report says that "at precisely 1.40 A. M. the explosion took place, the shock being hardly felt, and four distinct reports heard. What result was occasioned near the vessel we can only estimate by the feeble fire of the forts next day. My opinion is that, owing to the want of confinement and insufficient fusing of the mass, much of the powder was blown away before ignition, and its effect lost. The fuses were set by the clocks to one hour and a half, but the explosion did not occur till twenty-two minutes after that time had elapsed, the after part of the vessel being then enveloped in flames." Beyond all peradventure the powder was ignited by the fire that had been made in the stern of the boat as a *dernier ressort* for burning the powder and to prevent the vessel from falling into the hands of the enemy. The powder should have been exploded by the clocks at twenty minutes past one. But the explosion did not take place until about a quarter to two o'clock; then, as all the spectators admit, the stern of the boat was completely wrapped in flames, "the last thing they did being to set her on fire under the cabin," according to Admiral Porter. However in-

genious the machinery for the ignition of the fuses was, it is almost certain that it did not perform its part. Even if fuses were set, they never were properly laid. They were only run into the upper and outer bags in the deck-house. Holes were then merely bored through the deck to the powder below. If the Gomez fuses had been interlaced through every layer, as General Butler advised, a very different result would have been accomplished. The omission to run the fuses through the bags of powder below the decks was a serious error. Lieutenant-Commander Jeffers states in his report (see Report of Committee on the Conduct of the War, Fort Fisher Expedition, p. 250) that it had been suggested to use the Beardslee Electro-Magnetic Machine and wires to explode the powder, but that "it was not favorably considered by those charged with the execution of the plan." There must have been a mismanagement in the preparation of the appliances by which the powder was to be ignited. Every candid person must admit that the experiment was not properly made. The consequence was that a very small part of the powder was ever burnt; the remainder either went down with the wreck or was blown into the ocean. Therefore the theory of General Butler, that an immense torpedo like that of the Louisiana would, if properly exploded near an enemy's fortification, destroy it and paralyze the garrison, has never yet been tested. It may be stated in this connection that, had General Butler's plan been followed, the torpedo would have been run in upon the beach before firing it. No person can estimate what would have been the effect of the ignition of two hundred and ten tons of powder under the walls of Fort Fisher. The failure was not in the conception of the plan, but in its execution. Another great error was in attempting to explode the powder at such an early part of the night. Even if the effects hoped for had been accomplished, the enemy would have had ample time for recovery and repairs. Could there have been a more

inauspicious time selected, not only the hour of the night, but in the absence of the army? The Committee on the Conduct of the War found that "the time for the explosion was not such, in the opinion of your committee, as was proper to allow all the results which would have been attained by a more complete explosion to have been taken advantage of by the co-operating land force." Every one must recollect that but a small part of the powder was really exploded, and the fort was not materially injured.

The grand naval attack which had been preceded by the attempted explosion of the powder-boat was made on the following day.

Admiral Porter says: "At daylight on the 24th the fleet got under way and stood in, in line of battle. At 11.30 A. M. the signal was made to engage the forts, the Ironsides leading, and the Monadnock, Canonicus, and Mahopac following. The Ironsides took her position in the most beautiful and seamanlike manner, got her spring out, and opened deliberate fire on the fort, which was firing at her with all its guns, which did not seem numerous in the northeast face, though we counted what appeared to be seventeen guns; but four or five of these were fired from that direction, and they were silenced almost as soon as the Ironsides opened her terrific battery. The Minnesota then took her position in handsome style, and her guns, after getting the range, were fired with rapidity, while the Mohican, Colorado, and the large vessels marked on the plan, got to their stations, all firing to cover themselves while anchoring. By the last of the large vessels anchored and got their batteries into play, but one or two guns of the enemy were fired, this *feu d'enfer* driving them all to their bomb-proofs; . . . the battle became general; . . . such a torrent of missiles were falling into and bursting over it [the fort] that it was impossible for any human being to stand it. . . . But when they all got into place and commenced work in earnest, the shower

of shell (one hundred and fifteen per minute) was irresistible. . . . Our men were at work at the guns five hours, and glad to get a little rest." (See pages 123, 124, and 125, Report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War.) The fire of the navy on this attack was as rapid as on any of the following days. The navy must have fired away about half of its ammunition on this day, because, at the end of the bombardment on the 25th, Captain Breese told General Weitzel that the navy had not sufficient ammunition to continue in case the army would elect to remain on shore. Admiral Porter says in his report of the bombardment of the 25th December, "As the ammunition gave out the vessels retired from action." And in a letter to General Butler dated the 26th of December, 1864: "I have ordered the largest vessels to proceed off Beaufort and fill up with ammunition, to be ready for another attack." It is apparent that the ammunition used on the 24th of December contributed little to the objects of the expedition. The War and Navy Departments had determined that a combined attack of the two branches of the service was necessary for the reduction of the fort. [The Secretary of the Navy thought that it was not wise to even attempt the capture of the fort without a co-operating force of the army.] It does not appear from whence Admiral Porter had received instructions to make the purely naval attack on the 24th. Suppose that General Butler had returned to Fortress Monroe without making an effort in the direction of the object of the expedition, would it not have been the duty of Admiral Porter to postpone his attack until he had the necessary co-operating army force near the scene of operations and ready to land? What would the country have said if General Butler, while lying off Fort Fisher waiting for the navy, during the first days of beautiful weather which preceded the storm, had determined to take advantage of it and attack? The navy had no more right to attack without the army, than

the army would have had to attack without the navy. Still, the Admiral says that he determined to attack. It is very true that he states in his letter to Secretary Wells, dated January 21, 1865, "In a conversation with General Grant I expressly told him that I wanted nothing to do with General Butler." Notwithstanding this admission, it would be a very serious charge to make against the Admiral that he did not wish General Butler present when he made *his* attempt to take the stronghold. General Butler, on the other hand, seemed to have taken great precaution that the *entente cordiale* should be maintained between the army and navy. Admiral Porter, although the junior officer, sent his fleet captain to confer with General Butler instead of going himself, while the General twice called upon the Admiral at Fortress Monroe on business connected with the expedition. However, after the navy was once ready to commence, there seemed to be a desire to push ahead, regardless of the army. The commanding officer of the navy seemed to say, "Here I am off Fort Fisher, all prepared to attack, and determined to go on; I am going to take this fort myself; if the army wants to participate in the glory that will attend the achievement, it must hurry up, or it will be too late; if the fort succumbs to the fire of my navy, I will send a handful of my marines ashore and receive its surrender." The officers and men on board the *Baltic*, which vessel had remained at sea, crowded her decks in wonderment, gazing at the terrific fire on the fort, and asking themselves what advantage was to be gained by it, while the troops which had been deemed necessary to take the fortification were so many miles away. During the bombardment the fort replied at long intervals in a sullen and determined manner. There was no perceptible change in the appearance of the fort, for it proved, on its capture, that the heavy shots had struck in its sides and buried themselves in the sand, which had fallen back to its place

and refilled the breaches made by the projectiles. On Saturday morning, the 24th of December, General Butler was first informed at Beaufort, N. C., that the powder-boat had been exploded on the previous night at about a quarter before two o'clock. After ordering his transports to follow him, he started for and arrived off New Inlet between four and five P. M., in time to see the end of the first day's bombardment. A staff officer was sent on board to confer with Admiral Porter, but he returned word that he was too much fatigued to give them audience, but would receive General Weitzel and Colonel Comstock early in the morning. At half past six o'clock, Sunday morning, General Weitzel repaired on board the Malvern, with instructions from General Butler to urge the Admiral to run by the fort into Cape Fear River. To this proposition Admiral Porter did not accede. General Grant had said on this subject to General Weitzel: "Weitzel, this is to be made another Mobile affair. The navy will run some of their vessels into the Cape Fear, and I would advise you to land your troops and take a position across the peninsula, and then Fort Fisher and these works will fall exactly as Fort Morgan did."

There were a number of captured blockade-runners in the fleet that had been fitted up as gunboats. It had been thought that these vessels might have been utilized in this undertaking, but the Admiral decided otherwise, and the idea of making this another Mobile affair was abandoned. Preparations were now made to recommence the bombardment, and if possible to effect a landing of the troops. The transports had continued to arrive during the night, and by the morning of the 25th of December were in their proper position off New Inlet. At about eight A. M. the navy formed in line of battle, the Ironsides leading in the attack and the monitors following. The firing from the vessels was a great deal slower on this day than on the day before. It was half past one in the afternoon before the Flag Pond Battery was entirely

silenced, and arrangements were completed by the naval brigade, under command of Brigadier-General C. K. Graham, to commence the landing of the troops. To cover this landing the Brooklyn and seventeen gunboats opened fire on the strip of woods just back of the beach which hid the enemy from our view. They also sent boats to the troops and rendered every assistance they could. It was a grand sight to see the Brooklyn open her broadsides. The enemy did not seem to relish the fire, and soon retreated and allowed the army to make their landing without further resistance, but not until they had sent a few shots whistling through the rigging of the Ben Deford and the Baltic and other vessels of the army fleet. The landing was effected in the vicinity of the Flag Pond Battery, which was situated about three miles north of Fort Fisher. Five hundred men of General Curtis's brigade of General Ames's division were the first troops to land on the beach, General Curtis being the first man to touch the land. As this successful disembarkation took place, a prolonged cheer went up from the decks of the transports. By the energetic efforts of General Graham the remainder of Curtis's brigade was speedily and handsomely landed. Skirmishers were thrown out into the woods in front to cover the disembarkation which continued to take place. General Curtis immediately formed his brigade and marched toward the fort along the sea-beach. As this brigade approached Flag Pond Battery the garrison ran up the white flag of surrender. The troops pushed on rapidly through the sand, for they were naturally anxious to take the prisoners. However, ere this could be effected a boat was sent ashore and the garrison, to the number of sixty-five men, carried off on board of the Santiago de Cuba. These prisoners belonged to the 17th North Carolina Regiment, which regiment our troops had left in front of their lines near Richmond, Va., before starting upon the expedition. By the time Curtis's bri-

gade had been landed and formed, it was quite evident that the surf was rapidly becoming heavier; already many boats were swamped. It was with the greatest difficulty that ammunition could be got through the surf without becoming damaged. Still the disembarkation continued. By three o'clock a large number of the boats had been overturned either in passing through the surf to the shore or in attempting to return through it to the ships. Although by repeated efforts many were righted, still some of them were hopelessly lost. One boat was so suddenly overturned that a number of men were caught under it. It was some time before they could be rescued. None of the men after three o'clock reached the shore without getting a thorough drenching. The men struggled gallantly with the elements, and all that nerve and strength could do was done in order to get the boats through the still rapidly rising surf. By the Herculean efforts of all, the most of Pennypacker's brigade was landed and marched forward to support Curtis, who in the mean time had been pushed up to the attack. The sand being very deep, the marching was necessarily slow. It was an utter impossibility to march the men on the double-quick.

On its way up to the fort General Curtis's brigade captured a battalion of North Carolina Junior Reserves, numbering about two hundred and fifty men under the command of a major, who had been sent out of the fort because there were not a sufficient number of bomb-proofs there to contain them. They had been ordered to remain outside the works during the day and to return at night after the fire of the navy had ceased. This is an important fact. It seems to prove that there must have been a garrison large enough to man the parapet of the fort without drawing upon these reserves. This, taken together with the other facts; clearly shows that there was a well-disciplined garrison within the walls always ready to man the parapet and

palisade as soon as the bombardment should end. These prisoners were sent off on board the transports. While Curtis's brigade was preparing for the assault, some of the men came upon a line of telegraph, the wires of which were cut. They also captured a Rebel mail-bag. The letters were written by members of the senior reserves to their families about domestic matters, and to prominent men asking for their influence to get retired from further military duty. Curtis marched resolutely on, but notwithstanding his great efforts to force march his men, the day was fast growing to an end before he had advanced his skirmishers up to the fort and found himself in position to charge. This line was pushed up to within two hundred yards of the fort, the garrison being kept in their bomb-proofs by the fire of the navy. Ten men were wounded at this time by our own shells. Immediately upon the cessation of the fire of the navy, the garrison of the fort remanned the works and the palisade. The land front had only two of its guns disabled, and the fort was "substantially uninjured as a defensive work." The enemy opened on our skirmish line and fired through the loopholes of the palisade. General Butler in his report dated Head-quarters Department of Virginia and North Carolina, December 25, 1864, says that "it was evident as soon as the fire of the navy ceased, because of darkness, that the fort was fully manned again and opened with grape and canister upon our picket line." It would have been temerity to order a charge at this time.

The following are statements made by General Whiting, the Rebel commandant of the fort, just previous to his death, in reply to a series of questions framed by General Butler and bearing upon the subject of the strength and reinforcement of the garrison of Fort Fisher, and likewise upon the effect of the bombardment. It is a fact that these answers were not given under oath; still they were made by a man in the solemnity of his approaching

death, and therefore "will carry the force of moral truth and certainty, although not in the form of judicial evidence."

"Five (5) companies of the 36th Regiment North Carolina troops, and Adams's Light Battery, amounting to six hundred and sixty-seven (667) aggregate, was the number of the garrison at Fort Fisher on the 16th, 17th, and 18th of December last."

"On the 23d, one hundred and ten men, veteran artillery of the 10th Regiment North Carolina troops, fifty sailors and the 7th Battalion Junior Reserves, about two hundred and fifty strong, were thrown into the fort."

"Question 13. Please state whether any part, and if so, how much of the damage done to the fort by the fire of the navy was repaired during the night?"

"Answer. Casualties first day: killed, none; wounded, one (1) mortally, three (3) severely, and nineteen (19) slightly; total, 23. Five (5) gun-carriages disabled.

"Second day: killed, three (3); wounded, nine (9) mortally, six (6) severely, and twenty-eight (28) slightly; total, 46. Damage but very slight; one (1) 10-inch, two (2) 32-pounder, and one (1) 8-inch carriages disabled, and one (1) 10-inch gun disabled. Damage repaired at night. Enemy's fire formidable and sustained, but diffuse, unconcentrated. Apparent design of the fleet to silence the channel batteries, in order to force an entrance with his vessels, and not to attack by land.

"The garrison was in no instance driven from its guns, and fired in return, according to orders, slowly and deliberately, six hundred and sixty-two (662) shot and shells.

"Question 14. By-reason of the cessation of the bombardment at night, were you not able to rest and recruit your garrison?"

"Answer. We were able to do both.

"Question 15. At the time of the landing, where was the supporting force, if any, to the fort?"

"Answer. Assembling at Sugar Loaf as fast as Hoke's people arrived."

"Question 17. At the time our skirmish line was deployed before the fort, what was the condition of the guns and defences upon the land side as to efficiency for a defensive purpose?"

"Answer. The guns and defences on the land front were in perfect order at the time referred to, except two (2) disabled guns on the left; nineteen guns in position; palisade in perfect order and the mines the same, the wires not having been cut."

"Question 18. In view of the condition of the fort and its garrison, would it have been possible with either three (3) or six (6) thousand men to have taken the work by assault? (NOTE.— In answering this question, please give as many of the details for the reason you may give as possible.)

"Answer. Possible, yes. Probable, no. The work was very strong, the garrison in good spirits and ready; and the fire on the approaches (the assaulting column having no cover) would have been extraordinarily heavy. In addition to the heavy guns, I had a battery of Napoleons, on which I placed great reliance. The palisade alone would have been a most formidable obstacle." (See pages iv and v, Report Committee on the Conduct of the War.)

Before this immense stronghold, uninjured as it really was, stood Curtis's brigade; an isolated band of twelve hundred men on a narrow strip of land, with an enemy in their rear. General Ames says in his report, "Upon the report of Brevet Brigadier-General Curtis that he could take the fort, I sent his brigade forward to make the attempt." Even the gallant Curtis did not deem it wise to take the responsibility to assault, although he had permission from General Ames to do so. To have attacked with such an inadequate force would and could have only resulted in disaster and defeat. This brigade constituted all the troops that were within charging distance of the fort. General Ames strained every nerve to get Pennypacker's brigade up in time, but it could not be accom-



plished. Colonel Pennypacker could not have reinforced General Curtis, until late in the night, and before this the enemy would have made an attack upon their rear. There was no line, as there was in the second expedition, run across the land to guard against an attack from the direction of Wilmington. From the first prisoners General Butler learned that two brigades of Hoke's division of Rebel troops were in the woods near the point of our landing. The remainder of the division continued to arrive from Wilmington, to which place they had been ordered, after leaving the position occupied by them in front of General Butler near Richmond. The storm that was fast coming up might drive off the navy, and then the small body of our troops on shore would soon fall into the hands of the Confederates. General Whiting makes the following statement on the subject:—

“*Question 21.* In view of the condition of the weather immediately following the demonstration of the 25th of December, and in view of the force that might have concentrated upon the peninsula as well above as below the place of landing, would it, in your judgment, have been possible for six thousand men without artillery to have held out there, without being captured or overwhelmed, from the 26th of December to the 15th of January?”

“*Answer.* No; and it is a matter of grave charge against General Bragg that the whole force was not captured on the 26th of December. He had the force and the position.

“*Question 24.* Would you have deemed it the part of wisdom on the part of the commander of the Federal forces to have exposed his troops in the situation referred to in question twenty-one?”

“*Answer.* I do not. Neither attack was practicable in the presence of the supporting force, provided that had been under a competent officer. The first landing ought assuredly to have been captured entirely; and as for the second, although deriving much great

er advantages from the different mode of attack by the fleet, and though pressed with great vigor, it is due to the supineness of the Confederate general that it was not destroyed in the act of assault.” (See Report of Committee on Conduct of War, pages vi and vii.)

The greatest number of men ever on shore was about twenty-three hundred, and of that number there were not more than twelve hundred in position to assault. If the disembarkation had continued uninterruptedly, it is possible that General Ames's division of three thousand men might have been placed on shore. But there would have been no hope of reinforcements from the fleet, for the surf would have cut off all communication with the fleet, as it really did for over thirty hours. While our troops would have been in this dangerous position, the enemy could have reinforced to any extent. General Whiting, in the answer to the committee before referred to, says:—

“*Question 19.* Please state whether, with a force holding the beach, from the nature of the ground and from the configuration of the channel of Cape Fear River, it would have been possible for the Confederates to have reinforced or provisioned the fort to any extent?”

“*Answer.* No difficulty at all by the river.” (See Report of Committee on Conduct of War, page vi.)

After General Curtis's brigade had marched down the beach and Pennypacker's had been partially landed, General Butler, on board of the Chamberlain, ran down to a point about five hundred yards from Fort Fisher and near the position occupied by the monitors. Here he met General Weitzel, who stated that he thought it impossible to make a successful assault upon the fort. General Butler was convinced, by reason of the state of the weather, that the fort should be immediately attacked or that the small portion of the troops landed should be withdrawn. He then ordered Colonel Comstock, who was on board with him, to jump into a boat with General Weitzel, pull

ashore, and examine with General Weitzel and report to him if an assault is possible. "To me," he said, "it does not look possible, but I am unwilling to give it up."

At the same time General Graham reported to General Butler: "General, you have got either to provide for those troops to-night on shore some way, or get them off; because it is getting so rough that we cannot land much longer." General Butler says: "General Graham had been a naval officer, but is now in the service of the army and commanding the naval brigade. Considering a few moments, I determined the course of action that should govern me. A storm was coming on; the surf was rolling in; the barometer had fallen half an inch. If we got the men on shore, it might be, and probably would be, a week before we could send an ounce of provisions to them. In the mean time a deserter from the 62d North Carolina, whom I captured once before at Hatteras, in the early part of the war, having received good treatment, came in. He said that they had marched down from Richmond, and that Kirkland's brigade and another brigade were already down there; and that Hoke was on his way with large reinforcements and had arrived at Wilmington the night before. I then made up my mind what to do in view of the fact that a storm was coming on, and if it became necessary to effect a landing again we could do it any day in two hours without the loss of a man. I thought it a great deal better to risk that than to risk the attempt to get the men on shore and intrench them."

General Butler then adds, that: "I sent to him (Admiral Porter) and asked what could be done. He sent me word that he had not an hour's ammunition, and that he must go to Beaufort to replenish his ships." (See pages 23, 24, and 25, Report of Committee on Conduct of the War.)

The Major-General commanding, having maturely considered all the difficulties of the position, determined to extricate his army from its perilous

situation and ordered a re-embarkation of his troops. It was nearly dark when this order was given. The naval brigade and the boats from the navy all vied with each other in their efforts to get all the men off the beach that night. But at about nine o'clock that evening it was impossible to get any boats through the surf, and therefore the greater part of Curtis's brigade had to be left on the beach, near the point where they had landed in the morning without food or shelter. The rain fell and the wind blew in on the shore all that night. Only one boat passed through the surf on Sunday. There were the troops on the barren beach before us in plain view, but all the assistance that could be rendered was to cover them by the fire of the navy. Gunboats were sent to their relief with orders to keep up an uninterrupted fire upon the woods in rear of our troops, who had improvised an intrenchment to fight behind in case the Rebels undertook to make them prisoners. The enemy could never have captured that body of men, small as it was, without an overwhelming force, for they were part of the picked men of General Ames's division, who afterwards charged and carried Fort Fisher by assault. These troops were not all safely re-embarked until Monday, the 27th of December. The enemy did not seem to make an effort to prevent this. Most of the transports were sent North on Sunday, but General Butler and the remaining vessels did not leave until Monday. The Major-General commanding did not reach the head-quarters Army of the James until late in the night of the 28th of December. It was a day or so after this before all the troops had returned to their former camps.

General Butler, in causing a withdrawal of the troops that he had landed on the beach, acted under the advice of two engineer officers, than whom no more skilled and learned members of their profession held commissions in the United States Army. With respect to the motives which prompted this withdrawal General Weitzel said:

"After that experience (in assaulting military works), with the information I had obtained from reading and study, — for before this war I was an instructor at the Military Academy for three years under Professor Mahan, — and in face of the fact that I had been appointed a major-general only twenty days before, and needed confirmation; notwithstanding all that, I went back to General Butler, and told him I considered it would be murder to order an attack on that work with that force. I understood, Colonel Comstock to agree with me perfectly, although I did not ask him, and General Butler has since said that he did. . . .

"*Question.* Upon deliberation, and after all you have since learned, are you entirely satisfied with the opinion you then formed about attacking the fort?

"*Answer.* Yes, sir, I am fully satisfied, from all I have heard since, from the result of the second attack, and everything else, — I am fully satisfied that I did my duty there." (See page iii, Report of Committee on Conduct of the War.)

Colonel Comstock also gave the following testimony before the same committee: —

"*Question.* With the information that General Weitzel had, would you have agreed with him, independent of what General Curtis said to you?

"*Answer.* I should, from the information I had at that time." (See page iv, Report of Committee on Conduct of the War.)

A gallant officer and a few men, under the fire of the navy guns, approached so near to the fort as to carry off a flag which had been cut down by a shell, and was hanging over the parapet. "Thinking that probably the Rebels had not observed it, he crept upon his hands and knees to the palisading, found a hole in it that one of the shells had made, crept through the hole and up to the flag, and got it and got away with it, without being observed." (See Report of Committee on the Conduct of the War, p. 77.) But "this was done

while the shells of the navy were falling about the heads of the daring men who entered the works." Had Curtis's brigade charged through this fire of the navy, and had they been successful in getting possession of a portion of the fort, still this would have been but the beginning of their task; for it is known from experience with the same garrison in the second expedition, that they would have been obliged to fight after they got into the fortification itself. The whole of General Ames's division did fight this identical garrison, somewhat reinforced, inside of the fort, on the second expedition, for nearly seven hours, before there were indications that the Rebels contemplated giving up the battle as lost. There can be but little doubt that, had Curtis charged at the time, unsupported as he was, he would have lost the most of his brigade. On the first expedition the army had only three and one half hours of favorable weather to land and make the necessary arrangements to charge this stronghold of the Rebellion. The second expedition were accorded three days of uninterruptedly beautiful weather. The Committee on the Conduct of the War gave the question as to the refusal of the Major-General commanding the army forces to assault Fort Fisher a thorough and complete examination. The testimony covers over two hundred and sixty pages of printed matter, and after the most mature deliberation the Committee found as follows: "In conclusion, your committee would say, from all the testimony before them, that the determination of General Butler not to assault the fort seems to have been fully justified by all the facts and circumstances then known or afterwards ascertained."

In his instructions to General Butler the Lieutenant-General directed as follows: "The object of the expedition will be gained on effecting a landing on the mainland between Cape Fear River and the Atlantic, north of the north entrance to the river. Should such landing be effected, whether the enemy hold Fort Fisher or the batteries guard-

ing the entrance to the river there, the troops should intrench themselves, and by co-operating with the navy effect the reduction and capture of those places." General Butler does not seem to have been unmindful of these instructions. He did not believe that he had effected such a landing as was contemplated in General Grant's letter to him. There were sixty-five hundred men belonging to the army branch of the expedition. Out of this number there were only about twenty-three hundred men landed. There were very few supplies, no artillery, and little am-

munition placed on shore. This force amounted to about one third of the troops, and they were without the necessary supplies. This was merely a partial landing. General Butler explained his reason for withdrawing his forces in the following words: "By going away I would draw off the enemy's attention. If I remained there, it would keep his forces concentrated at that point; and if I was driven away by the storm that was coming up, then I should lose the men I had landed. I acted for the best, according to the light I had."

*H. C. Lockwood.*

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June 1871

## THE CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER.

### SECOND EXPEDITION.

THE first expedition against Fort Fisher failed to capture the fort, but it acted as a successful reconnoissance by which information of the most important character was obtained. When the first attempt was made, it was supposed by the Secretary of the Navy and the Lieutenant-General that the navy could run the batteries and isolate the Rebels. Admiral Porter decided, in the light of his experience on the first expedition, that this was impracticable. The second expedition enjoyed all the benefits of the experience gained by the failure of the first, and it sailed to execute certain definite instructions. Its action was not to depend upon the result of reconnoissance or experiment. Immediately upon the receipt of the news announcing the unsuccessful character of the first expedition, Secretary Welles, at the suggestion of the President, telegraphed Lieutenant-General Grant, requesting him to order the return of a force sufficient to render certain the fall of the

defences of the port of Wilmington. True to that tenacity of purpose which always characterized the action of General Grant throughout the whole Rebellion, he immediately ordered that preparations be made to re-embark the troops for another attempt, in co-operation with the navy, to carry these strongholds, so useful to the life of the Confederacy and so dangerous to the success of the Union arms.

On the 1st day of January, 1865, Major-General Benjamin F. Butler and Brevet Major-General Alfred H. Terry had an extended interview with Lieutenant-General U. S. Grant, at his head-quarters at City Point, Va. It was here determined that the second expedition should be intrusted to the command of General Terry. On the 2d of January orders were issued to the troops that were to take part in the enterprise, and on the night of the 3d they were marched to Bermuda Hundreds, where they were embarked on ocean transports, under the direction



of Colonel George S. Dodge of the Quartermaster's Department. On the morning of the 5th of January the fleet was at Fortress Monroe and in readiness to sail.

The army force consisted of the same troops which composed the first expedition, together with the Second Brigade of the Third Division of the Twenty-fourth Army Corps, under the command of Colonel J. C. Abbott of the Seventh New Hampshire Volunteers; Battery E, Third United States Artillery, under the command of Lieutenant Myrick; a siege train; a detail of artillerists; and a company of engineers. These troops taken together numbered about eighty-five hundred men. There were twenty-one first and second class transport steamers, and a third class of small vessels and tenders. General Terry made his head-quarters on the McClellan, General Ames on the Atlantic, and General Paine on the Champion. On the morning of the 6th of January this fleet sailed under sealed orders. Everything seemed to have been admirably and expeditiously managed. On opening the orders, the point of destination was found to be twenty-five miles off Beaufort, N. C. Here the army fleet once more found that of the navy, which had withdrawn to this point. It was the misfortune of this expedition to experience a gale almost equal in fury to that which the first encountered. This heavy weather commenced immediately after the sailing of the fleet, and continued until the 11th of January. Some of the vessels had become scattered, and others driven into Beaufort, and delays were occasioned, so that it was not until the morning of the 12th that Admiral Porter steamed out and led the fleets in the direction of New Inlet. This day was a beautiful one, and the Atlantic had the appearance of an immense placid lake. At about ten o'clock in the evening both fleets came to anchor at a point five miles north of Fort Fisher. Early on the following morning the Brooklyn, the double-enders, and other gunboats opened a fire on

the woods directly in the rear of the position upon which it was decided to land the troops. The first troops were landed on the beach about four miles north of New Inlet. Pickets were thrown out in every direction. The enemy did not make any opposition to this movement. In fact, not a single shot was fired at our troops at this time. During this day eighty-five hundred men were landed, with forty rounds of ammunition, six days' hard bread in bulk, and three hundred thousand additional rounds of small arms ammunition. The landing was accomplished amid the greatest enthusiasm of the soldiers. Cheer upon cheer went up, clearly indicating their splendid *morale*. The surf gave some trouble at first, but it seemed to subside as the day progressed. This favorable condition of the surf continued through the three days of active operations which culminated in the accomplishment of the object of the expedition. Paine's division of colored troops having been successfully disembarked, it was marched a short distance toward the fort, and then directed across the peninsula to the Cape Fear River. After the line had been established across this narrow strip of land, the troops threw up a strong intrenchment from the ocean to the river and facing Wilmington. It was undoubtedly General Terry's object to prepare himself against an attack from that direction. It was well known that Hoke's division of Rebel troops had been relieved from Richmond and transferred to the defences of Wilmington about the 22d of December, 1864. This division probably numbered about four thousand men, and would undoubtedly have attacked the army forces, had they believed that there were no earthworks in their front. Colonel Abbott's brigade also formed a part of this line. On the 14th of January Captain Lee's and Lieutenant Myrick's batteries were landed, and placed in position on the line already described. In this way General Adelbert Ames was left free to operate against the fort, without any fears of an attack upon his rear. The

enemy would have had to destroy a division and a brigade of troops before they could interfere with this more direct attack. On the 14th the first brigade of Ames's division was moved up toward the fort, while the other two brigades were held in reserve. The skirmishers were advanced to within one hundred and fifty yards of the work. In doing this an outwork was captured, and an unsuccessful attempt made to turn the guns against the main fortification. Active preparations were continued for the bloody conflict, which finally took place on the following day. On the entire 13th and 14th the navy maintained a tremendous bombardment of the fort. The Admiral had adopted a different plan of attack, which seemed to be successful in materially damaging the fortification. On the evening of the 14th General Terry went on board of the *Malvern* to arrange with Admiral Porter the plan of attack for the next day. The Admiral says (see page 189, Report of Committee on the Conduct of the War): "It was arranged between the General and myself that the ships should all go in early, and fire rapidly through the day, until the time for the assault to come off. The hour named was five P. M. I detailed sixteen hundred sailors and four hundred marines to accompany the troops in the assault, the sailors to board the sea face, while the troops assaulted the land side." The following are among the directions that were given to the sailors and marines to regulate them in their landing upon the beach, and in their assault upon the sea face of the fort:—

"GENERAL ORDER NO. 81.

"FLAG-SHIP MALVERN, January 4, 1865.

"... That we may have a share in the assault, when it takes place, the boats will be kept ready lowered near the water on the off side of the vessels. The sailors will be armed with cutlasses, well sharpened, and with revolvers. When the signal is made to man the boats, the men will get in, but not show themselves. When signal is made to

assault, the boats will pull around the stern of the monitors and land right abreast of them and board the fort on the run in a seaman-like way." (See page 198, Report of Committee on the Conduct of the War.)

"LANDING ORDER.

"FLAG-SHIP MALVERN,  
OFF NEW INLET, JANUARY 15, 1865.

"... No move is to be made forward until the army charges, when the navy is to assault the sea or southeast face of the work, going over with cutlasses drawn and revolvers in hand. The marines will follow after, and when they gain the edge of the parapet they will lie flat and pick off the enemy in the works. The sailors will charge at once on the field-pieces in the fort and kill the gunners. The mouths of the bomb-proofs must be secured at once, and no quarter given if the enemy fire from them after we enter the fort. Any man who straggles or disobeys orders is to be sent to the rear under a guard. The men must keep their flags rolled up until they are on top of the parapet and inside the fort, when they will hoist them. . . . If, when our men get into the fort, the enemy commence firing on Fort Fisher from the mound, every three men will seize a prisoner, pitch him over the walls, and get behind the fort for protection, or into the bomb-proofs." (See pages 194 and 195, Report of Committee on the Conduct of the War.)

Sunday, the 15th day of January, 1865, proved to be a bright and beautiful day. The air was mild and balmy as a May day. The sun shed its bright rays upon the scene through a cloudless sky. What little wind there was blew off shore flattening the surf and ocean to a calm seldom experienced off the coast. But this was not to be a day of rest for the boys in blue on sea or shore before Fort Fisher. The storm of human conflict was soon to burst forth.

Early in the morning General Ames, at the head of Bell's and Pennypacker's



brigades of his division, took up his line of march toward the fort. As this advance was made, the Tallahassee, a Rebel gunboat in the Cape Fear River, opened fire upon this body of men. A number of officers and men were killed and wounded; a captain was obliged to have his leg amputated. This vessel was soon afterward driven off and did not make her appearance again. Immediately upon the arrival of Pennypacker's brigade, directly in front of the fort, the First Brigade was moved forward in line of battle to a new position about two hundred yards from the fort; the right resting near the Cape Fear River, and the left extending toward the ocean and parallel to the front of the fort, and covering one half its land face. The skirmishers were about a hundred yards in advance of this line. This movement had to be executed under a sharp musketry fire and an occasional discharge of grape and canister. The Second Brigade, under command of Colonel Pennypacker, was now moved forward, also in line of battle, to a position of five hundred yards from the fort and parallel to the line formed by the First Brigade. The Third Brigade, under command of Colonel Bell, was formed in a similar manner about seven hundred yards from the fort. This column of brigades was formed on the open sandy beach, directly in front of the land face and opposite the westerly side of the fort. The men were moved up quickly, and as soon as they were properly placed, they threw up small rifle-pits for temporary protection. While these operations were taking place, General Terry and staff and General Ames and his staff occupied a prominent position near an old earthwork about five hundred and fifty yards from the fort. General Ames gave a personal supervision to every detail of these preliminary manœuvres; going himself, and sending his staff to the front and to the flanks in order to correct and establish the lines of attack. All these evolutions were executed with the precision and order of a

parade. At this time a number of brave men volunteered to go forward in advance of the skirmishers and cut away the palisade. They were provided with axes for this purpose. In the mean time, while these operations of the army had been going on, a force of sailors and marines, numbering two thousand men, were landed on the sea-beach under the command of Fleet Captain K. R. Breese. The head of this column had been pushed up to within a few hundred yards of the fort, by means of a succession of intrenchments and rifle-pits, which were promptly occupied by the United States Marine Corps. The navy had kept up its terrific fire upon the fort. Nevertheless at no time was it entirely silenced. The Ironsides and monitors hurled forth their immense projectiles; the grand old frigates boomed out their heavy broadsides; and the gunboats poured in their whistling shots upon the doomed stronghold. Probably the fire of the navy was not so rapid as on some of the previous days of the attack, but it was certainly far more accurate and effective. It was the wonder of the army artillerists to see how it was possible for ships at sea to direct an artillery fire with such precision. By means of army signals, General Terry was in continued conversation with Admiral Porter, who was over a mile distant. In this way the navy were requested to direct their fire either against the parapet or against the palisade. By this time the assaulting column of soldiers, sailors, and marines, numbering about five thousand two hundred men, were in readiness to charge. If Abbott's brigade, which was brought up toward the close of the action, be counted, then the assaulting column numbered in the aggregate six thousand three hundred men. At half past three o'clock the signal was given to the navy to cease firing. At the instant the steam whistles shrieked out this signal, General Curtis, who commanded the first line, sprang to his feet and shouted the order of advance to his brigade. With

a wild cheer his men charged forward ; many passing through the apertures in the palisade, across the ditch and up to the parapet, the rest charging across a bridge which led around to the left and rear of the fort. This charge was under the direction of a staff-officer of General Ames, who was the first man on the parapet of the fort, and was stricken down, severely wounded, while planting a color on the top of one of the traverses. Three other members of his staff were struck at this time ; of these Captain Dawson afterward died of his injuries. The Second Brigade was now ordered forward and successfully entered the fort. The most of this brigade entered by the bridge already mentioned. The planks were torn up, leaving the soldiers to cross upon the string-pieces. At this juncture Colonel Pennypacker was so seriously wounded that his life was despaired of for many months. This charge of the two brigades was met by the enemy with a vigorous resistance. They sprang to their guns and fought with desperation, contesting each traverse and bomb-proof inch by inch. A half-hour's fighting gave the army possession of about five or six of the immense traverses and also a firm footing to the left and rear of the fort.

The brave sailors and marines at the signal had rushed to the attack. They met with a murderous grape and canister and musketry fire. Their ranks were rapidly thinned beneath the fearful storm of iron, but the survivors pressed bravely forward to close up the gaps. Great gallantry was displayed by the officer who led these men into the "deadly breach." Lieutenants B. H. Porter and S. W. Preston were instantly killed. They had been classmates and messmates, they had been captured and suffered imprisonment together, and at last died fighting side by side. Captain Breese, in his report, says:—

"Finding the rear of the men retreating, I hastened toward it to form them under cover, and have them use their rifles, but they were too far distant for me to reach them, and I ac-

cordingly returned to a position near the works. As I did so the remaining men, notwithstanding all attempt to stop them, fled, with the exception of about sixty, among whom were Lieutenant-Commander James Parker, C. H. Cushman, T. O. Selfridge, and M. Sicard, and Lieutenant N. H. Farquhar and R. H. Lamson, the latter of whom was wounded, and several volunteer officers whose names I unfortunately do not know. The fire of the enemy was so severe that the few of our men remaining had to seek such cover as they could, and there remained until dark, when a demonstration upon the part of the Rebels induced all to make a rush, and most succeeded in escaping." (See page 193, Report of the Committee on the Conduct of the War.)

This part of the assaulting column, having been driven back in confusion, was not again brought in requisition against the fort. In the latter part of the fight they were rallied to man the position out of which Colonel Abbott's brigade was moved. The sailors did all that could have been expected of them. They had not been properly armed for such service. Cutlasses and revolvers may be the suitable weapons to arm men with for the purpose of boarding a vessel at sea, where the fighting is necessarily confined to a small space, but they will not do for an attack upon a strong fortification, defended by artillery and infantry.

The First and Second Brigades of General Ames's division had been gallantly fighting all this time inside of the fort. The troops had gained by their desperate valor a number of the traverses and had advanced across the west part of the *terre-plein* almost to the centre of the fort. General Curtis, who had been conspicuous throughout the day for his bravery and coolness, fell, badly wounded by a canister shot. Colonel Bell's brigade was then advanced. His manly form was seen at the head of his column, as it darted forward over the bridge and into the fort. But this was the Colonel's

last charge, for at this point the brave and noble soldier fell, mortally wounded. His brigade was moved forward against the sea face of the fort. The ground over which the brigade had to charge was obstructed by the *débris* of the barracks, while the enemy was protected by the traverses and magazines. The navy had recommenced their fire upon the sea face, after the repulse of the sailors and marines. This fire assisted in sweeping the traverses for the advance of the men. It ceased at dark, and was again reopened for a short time, but it was soon found that the fire was killing and wounding our own men. It was therefore finally discontinued. The impetuous resistance of the garrison would not permit darkness to cause a cessation of hostilities. The fearful encounter was continued. The enemy kept up a continual artillery fire from the mound upon the soldiers who held the western part of the fort. The bursting of shell, the rattling of musketry, shouts of the men, groans of the wounded, all went to make up a perfect Pandemonium.

General Ames, who had entered the fort at the head of the Second Brigade, remained there fighting with his men until the close of the action. He had been made particularly conspicuous, not only by the prominent and advanced position he had occupied, but by a brigadier-general's full dresscoat, which he wore on that day. It was next to a miracle to see him go unscathed, while his officers and men were continually falling by his very side. There he stood among his troops. No advice to retreat, no request to postpone the engagement until the following morning, found a listening ear with him. "Advance, drive the enemy from their works," was his repeated order. To his determined bravery and skill on this occasion the country owes more than to any other one officer either in the army or navy. Although the garrison was already showing signs of weakness, still General Ames, wishing to make "assurance double sure," at about eight o'clock sent to General

Terry for reinforcements. He immediately forwarded Colonel Abbott's brigade, which went gallantly to the rescue. At the same time General Terry, who had continued to occupy the position he had held in the first part of the assault, so that he could be in perfect communication with the fleet, entered Fort Fisher. Abbott's brigade was formed near the river, while a portion of these reinforcements, armed with Spencer's carbines, were ordered to advance on the sea front. At about nine o'clock a general assault was made, and the Rebels retreated out of the fort toward Battery Buchanan. Cheer after cheer now rang out upon the night air; the fact of the capture of the fort was signalled to the fleet almost immediately. The navy vessels sent up rockets in celebration of the glorious event. In the excitement and joy of the moment, the killed, the dying, and the wounded were apparently forgotten.

Abbott's brigade was now ordered to advance upon Battery Buchanan. Here General Whiting and Colonel Lamb were found both badly wounded. The garrison, to the number of about nineteen hundred men, surrendered at this place, and were marched back to the vicinity of Fort Fisher. Thus, after one of the most stubbornly fought battles of the war, this fortification fell into the hands of the Union forces. The sacrifices of the army, navy, and marine corps, in killed and wounded, amounted to eight hundred men. The Rebel loss was trifling compared to the Union.

In the language of General Ames, "the name of every officer and man engaged in this desperate conflict should be mentioned"; but space at the present will not allow the recital of the sacrifices and acts of heroism of that day.

The next morning a terrific explosion of the main magazine of the fort occurred. By this accident, one hundred and fifty men were killed and wounded, and many a brave man who had survived the conflict of the day before lost his life. It was undoubtedly

caused by some person entering the magazine with a light, without knowing its nature.

On the night of the 16th of January, the Rebels having lost the key of the position, blew up and abandoned Fort Casswell and the works on Smith's Island. The United States forces triumphantly entered Wilmington, N. C., on Washington's birthday.

Every circumstance of the second expedition was most auspicious. So favorable was the weather, that constant communication was kept up with the fleet and transports, and the navy was accorded three successive days for bombarding the fort, so that when the column moved to the assault there were but few guns to oppose them.

General Terry deserves the highest encomiums for the manner in which he prepared and organized all the details of the operations which culminated in the attack upon Fort Fisher. It is true that some reinforcements had been thrown in the fort after the first attempt to carry it, but General Whiting has stated that they were not of good material. (See page 108, Report on the Conduct of the War.)

Admiral Porter's theory in relation to the force necessary to take the fort was, that after he had bombarded it, any land force could successfully assault it, and when they had carried the parapet, that the garrison would capitulate. The Admiral makes use of the following statements in describing the events of the first expedition: "The works were battered and burnt to that degree that there appeared no life within the walls. . . . Until late in the day on the 26th the forts laid at our mercy, and if the men had not been brought off, the Rebels would have surrendered when they marched up and the navy opened fire." (See Report Committee on the Conduct of the War, page 178.) "They (the forts) were so blown up, burst up, and torn up, that the people inside had no intention of fighting any longer. . . . There never was a fort that invited soldiers to walk in and take possession more plainly than Fort Fish-

er. . . . We have shown the weakness of this work. It can be taken at any moment in one hour's time." (See Report Secretary of Navy, page 51.)

To the superficial observer the final capture of the fort might seem to prove the correctness of these views; but it establishes the contrary. It appears from the experience of the second expedition that assaulting the fort was but half of the work to be done; for after the troops had gained the inside and rear of the fort, the fight continued for over six hours. The troops first got possession of the west part of the fort, and then the fight partook of the nature of a battle of infantry against infantry. Assaulting the fort was one thing, capturing its garrison was another. This great fact seems to have been entirely lost sight of by those who believe that the engineer officers showed timidity on the first expedition. However, Admiral Porter afterwards changed his mind materially on the subject of the strength of the fort and the forces necessary to carry it. In his testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War (see page 190) he says: "I have since visited Fort Fisher and the adjoining works, and find their strength greatly beyond what I had conceived. An engineer might be excusable in saying they could not be captured except by regular siege. I wonder even now how it was done. The work, as I said before, is really stronger than the Malakoff Tower, which defied so long the combined power of France and England; and yet it is captured by a handful of men under the fire of the guns of the fleet, and in seven hours after the attack commenced in earnest."

Bearing in mind all the difficulties that surrounded the first expedition, and at the same time the remarkably favorable events of the second, it must be admitted that General Butler's withdrawal of that part of his troops which had been landed, from their exposed position before the walls of Fort Fisher was a duty which he owed to his soldiers and to his country.





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